

The View

Veterans Information Especially for Women



Don't Let Your Money Go Up In Smoke!

By **CAROLE BONDS**

Imagine what you could do with an extra \$ 1000 or more a year from now.

A one pack a day smoker spends about \$ 1000 in a year on cigarettes. If you smoke more than a pack, you can figure out the amount. Instead of smoking, put the amount of money each day that you would spend on cigarettes in a big jar, box, or piggybank. At the end of the year, buy yourself something special with that money. It could be a nice Christmas present for you next Christmas.

The best present, however, would be how much your health would be improved. Almost every organ in your body is affected by smoking and your risk of many diseases is increased by smoking. A year, or two, after you quit, your risk of coronary heart disease will have decreased by half. The risk of stroke decreases steadily after you quit, and within 5-15 years after quitting, your risk will return to that of a non-smoker. There is a wonderful computer educational program providing information on effects of smoking on many of your organs and the benefits of quitting smoking; it has excellent graphics that will even rotate for you. This program can be found at

http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sgr/sgr/_2004/sgranimation/flash/index.html.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), tobacco-related disease kills over 178,000 women every year, making it the largest preventable cause of death among women in the U.S. In 1987, lung cancer surpassed breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer death among women. There is also evidence that suggests that breast cancer is more likely to spread to the lungs in women who smoke. Recent CDC information shows that smoking-related cancer deaths are declining in men, but increasing in women. There is evidence that links cancers of the bladder, pancreas, kidney, larynx and esophagus to smoking.

Women who smoke are also more than twice as likely to have a heart attack as women who do not smoke. As a matter of fact, in 2000 heart disease killed more than 360,000 women in the U.S. Most heart disease in women less than 50 years old is attributable to smoking. And for both men and women, the risk of having a heart attack increases with the number of cigarettes smoked. However, if you quit smoking, you can have your risk of heart attack decrease significantly with each year that passes. After 15 years, the risk will be nearly that of a non-smoker.

The list of diseases related to smoking keeps increasing with more research. In addition to the more commonly known diseases, this list now includes abdominal aortic aneurysm, acute myeloid leukemia,

periodontitis and cataracts. Many people are also not aware that smoking affects your mood, increasing the risk of depression. Within 10 seconds after inhaling smoke, nicotine reaches the brain, altering the brain chemistry.

Did you know that women who smoke get more wrinkles than women who don't smoke? Reportedly, this has to do with decreased elasticity in the skin. And postmenopausal women who smoke have decreased bone density when compared to women who do not smoke. In addition, there is an increased incidence of hip fractures in women who smoke.

The knowledge that you are not just damaging your own health, but also those around you from secondhand smoke can be a strong incentive to quit. How many of us wish to damage the health of our children, grandchildren, or significant others? Because young children's lungs are not fully developed, they are particularly susceptible to secondhand smoke. Exposure to secondhand smoke in young children is associated with higher risks for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), asthma, bronchitis, and pneumonia. Secondhand smoke is also associated with an increased risk for lung cancer and coronary heart disease in nonsmoking adults. Secondhand smoke contains a complex mixture of more than 4,000 chemicals, more than 50 of which are cancer-causing agents. Exposing others to your secondhand smoke could be likened to poisoning them.

The bottom line is that there are many, many health reasons to not start smoking, or to quit smoking. In the year 2000, 44 million Americans successfully quit smoking. YOU too can be successful at quitting smoking. Is it easy to quit smoking? We know that nicotine is addictive, so it is not easy to quit using it. However, we have learned that there are things that can assist you in your effort to quit. Develop a plan with your healthcare provider to stop smoking. There are medications, gums, support groups, and other things that can make quitting easier. If you have tried to quit before and were unsuccessful, don't let that discourage you. Many times people try more than once to quit prior to being successful with their effort to quit. North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System has a Smoking Cessation Program available to help you. If you would like to attend this program, ask your Primary Care Provider for a consult to Psychology Service for Smoking Cessation Program. If you would like more information about this program, you could call the Psychology office at 352/374-6020 or use the toll free number 800-324-8387, extension 6020. According to Dr. McGuigan most of those participating in the program who quit smoking report themselves happier and having underestimated how good they would feel about having accomplished what they once thought was impossible.

Don't forget to be thinking of what you are going to buy yourself one year from now with your direct savings dollars- \$ 1,000 or more! And begin to imagine yourself feeling better, becoming healthier, and, perhaps, even happier one year from now! You CAN be successful at quitting!

Ho, Ho, HELP!!!

By **LINDA FELDTHAUSEN**

So here we are with the holidays soon to be on top of us - and instead of peace/love/joy, we seem to be feeling mainly overwhelmed. Feeling stressed out around the holidays is common (especially for women who are trying to do it all), but there are some simple ways to cope, and even thrive, through these demanding times. There are three areas of demands placed on us at this time of year, and understanding how to view and manage these demands can help you achieve a more balanced holiday celebration.

Area 1: Expectations – Do you find yourself trying to recreate that “Hallmark Christmas?” Many people think that anything less is a sign of personal failure. Stop looking at advertising as a benchmark for your own life – it’s all fake anyway! Instead, take the time to have fun and enjoy the blessings of the season.

- Learn to say “no.” Don’t take on too many commitments. Know the limits of what you can do, and don’t feel guilty about refusing to take on others’ problems.

- Balance your time between “wants” and “shoulds” – give yourself time to do things you love, such as singing or walking in nature or visiting with friends.

- Slow down – take time out for relaxation exercises every day. Spending 30 minutes a day in meditation, yoga, or breathing exercises will do wonders for your spirit.

- Let others help – it’s more fun to share the work of cooking dinner or planning a party when you divide the labor among friends/family. Who cares if the mashed potatoes have a few lumps? It’s better than having a grouchy, stressed cook.

- Don’t go into debt trying to impress others with extravagant gifts. The best gift you can give anyone comes from your heart, not your wallet.

Area 2: Relationships – Are you dreading having to face an unpleasant family member, or anticipating fireworks from a long-simmering family feud? Do you miss absent family members and worry that it’s not right to have fun without them? Are you lonely and feeling like you’re the only person in the world without family/friends for the holidays?

- Don’t get drawn into family fights. Stand back and allow yourself to simply observe what is going on without being a part of it. Watch the family dynamics without judgment.

- Avoid family gatherings if you find them too unpleasant, or shorten the amount of time you expose yourself to toxic family members. You can plan an alternate activity or time to get together with ones you care about.

- Don’t dwell on who or what is missing. Absent or departed people need not be forgotten but should not be the focus of attention. You should be focusing on the blessings you enjoy in your life – love, health, peace, security – and remembering that not everyone on this planet enjoys the same measure of blessings.

- If you are alone, share your holiday with others in a similar situation. There are plenty of nursing homes, shelters, and hospitals full of lonely people who would love to spend time with you.

- Reach out for support when you need it. Talking about your feelings with a trusted friend, family member, clergy, or mental health professional can help defuse tension and bring clarity to your thoughts.

Area 3: Healthy Eating – You don’t have to sabotage your diet and undermine your fitness regimen just because you are surrounded by copious amounts of fattening food. By planning ahead and learning to moderate your intake, you can enjoy all of your favorite treats.

- Never say that a certain food is “off limits.” Allow yourself to have one or two bites, if you wish, and savor the experience.

- Stay mindful when you are eating – don’t combine eating with other activities, such as watching TV or addressing cards or reading a magazine. That only encourages you to stuff more in your mouth without being aware of your body’s response. You’re not hearing the stomach’s message to the brain of “that’s enough, thank you.”

- When you are going to a large family gathering or party, pre-load. Have a healthy snack, such as half an apple and some lowfat cheese, prior to going so that you are not famished when faced with the bulging buffet table. You’ll be able to make healthier choices.

- Be aware of portion sizes – there’s really no need to eat a towering mountain of mashed potatoes when half a cup, enjoyed mindfully, would fulfill your craving.

- Keep moving – exercise is your best friend, especially during the holidays. Not only does it burn extra calories to make up for a few extra treats, moderate exercise will lift your mood and make it less likely that you will crave sweets.

- Limit high calorie and alcoholic beverages. These empty calories can add up quickly and leave you feeling bloated and depressed. Choose to drink plenty of fresh water along with whatever beverage you choose – it will help your body’s digestion and give you a sense of fullness.

Practicing these tips through the days ahead will bring you a more balanced and joyous holiday season where you can focus on those things that are most important to your health and happiness. Remember, be nice to others, have fun, and stay mentally and emotionally in the present – don’t be consumed by expectations, memories of the past, or fears of the future. May you all enjoy a most peaceful and loving holiday.

Think Pink

October was National Breast Cancer Awareness month. Ms. Peggy Dukes and Annie Brooks coordinated a “Think Pink” day at our Lake City VA to increase awareness of this disease. Information displays and pink ribbons for people to wear were a part of the day. They are currently working on plans for some kind of fundraiser to help fight breast cancer and/or to assist victims of the disease. Ms. Dukes serves on the Board for the American Cancer Society

for the Lake City area and is working collaboratively with them for this event. Watch for more news on this fundraiser in the future.

In addition, the nurses on the Oncology Unit, 4A, in Gainesville purchased t-shirts featuring the pink ribbon. They wore the shirt on several different days during the month to promote breast cancer awareness. Staff from this unit will also have a breast cancer display at the upcoming Women’s Health Fair in January.

Upcoming Events

Mark your calendar so you won’t forget!

The monthly lecture series continues. It’s a time to learn about a health topic and meet some other women veterans. We also have refreshments together. We have had wonderful speakers who have provided excellent information. Please join us so that you can be an educated healthcare consumer. Special note to women veterans who are also VA employees-You can get one hour of education credit for your attendance.

**January 7, 2005, 9 AM TO 2 PM,
Women’s Health Fair**
Gainesville Auditorium

**January 20, 2005, 10:30-11:30AM
Eating for Health**
By Linda Feldthausen, Ph.D.
Room E-526, Gainesville

**February 17, 2005, 10:30-11:30AM
Benefits of Exercise**
By Susan Stewart, ARNP
Room E-526, Gainesville

**March 17, 2005, 10:30-11:30 AM
Creativity**
By Marianne Prince, MSN
Room E-526, Gainesville

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